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## Suspicion mounts on Laird arms plea

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WASHINGTON — Suspicion is growing here that Defense Sec. Melvin R. Laird is speaking for the Joint Chiefs of Staff when he links the Moscow arms limitation agreements and big spending on new nuclear weapons systems.

Whether Laird also is speaking for President Nixon is something that White House correspondents have failed to pin down although they have tried for three days in a row to get the answer out of Ronald Ziegler, White House press secretary.

When Laird appears on Capitol Hill to repeat what he originally stated June 6 — that he would recommend against adoption of the Moscow agreements if Congress failed to support administration requests for big increases in spending on a new missile submarine and a new manned bomber — he always is accompanied by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Adm. Thomas H. Moorer,

the chairman, has never stated publicly that he, too, would recommend against adoption of the agreements under those circumstances. But he has backed up Laird's argument that the Trident submarine and the B-1 bomber are vital to national security.

THE CHIEFS, as President Nixon told Congress, "unanimously" approved the arms limitation agreements. But their price for this, it is believed, is administration pressure on Congress to win approval of the new weapons funding.

When Ziegler was pressed on the question of whether Laird was speaking for the President, he said this was a hypothetical question. This was so, he said, because the President expects Congress to approve the Moscow agreements and to approve the defense budget as well.

He then observed that Presidential assistant Henry Kissinger had stated at the briefing for key congressmen that there was no link between the

agreements and the new weapons projects, that each stood on its own merits.

Finally, he said Laird was speaking as defense secretary. But he never did say whether he also was speaking for the President.

SOME OF the sharpest criticism Laird has encountered in his 3½ years as defense secretary was voiced Wednesday when he testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), committee chairman, accused Laird of using "scare tactics" and "misinformation" to try to win congressional approval of the stepped up spending on weapons.

Laird had done the same thing in 1969, Fulbright charged, when he "scared" Congress into appropriating money for an anti-ballistic missile system. Laird's argument then, that this was necessary to counter a Russian first-strike threat, was discounted by the Central Intelligence Agency, Fulbright asserted. Laird denied this.

Fulbright observed the committee had an executive session Tuesday with CIA Director Richard Helms and that the intelligence information he supplied did not jibe with that provided by Laird.